

September 27, 2015

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 2

TITLE: Re-Confirmation Class – Lesson #: Holy Spirit

Welcome back as we continue our journey through Re-Confirmation Class. As one of the leaders of our bi-annual youth confirmation class, it seems a bit odd to teach about the Holy Spirit without a bowl of freshly popped pop-corn in the center of the room—no theological significance implied—and a flip chart in the corner with Sharpies of every color scattered around on the floor. But really I'm sorry that you are confined to pews when the topic of our study together today is the Holy Spirit, who, Jesus tells us, is always on the move. We should be, at the very least, in a room with a good cross-breeze.

So let me try to take you there for just a few minutes. Imagine yourself sitting in the Parlor upstairs, the soft upholstered chairs in a circle, and the windows open on three sides of the room. You can hear the wind cutting through the room. You can hear the chatter on the street: car doors opening and closing, birds singing, the bass from a car radio passing by, someone shouting a greeting to a friend they haven't seen in a while—you might even recognize the voice.

You count off into groups of three to form teams for a scavenger hunt of sorts. For the only time, *ever*, during a confirmation class, are you asked to take out your cell phone and, for the next fifteen minutes, take a picture of every indication of the Holy Spirit you can find in the church building. You are warned that you'll have to explain your answers.

As we gather again we start looking at pictures you took: of people on the labyrinth praying, of the stone-carved dove in the Trinity chapel, of the orange banners of Taizé, of missionaries putting windows in a house on the shore, of Malawian Christians gathered in a prayer house, of kids playing violin, of the poster for the PW Bible Study, of teens cooking dinner with new friends from Rodef Shalom for families staying at the Ronald McDonald House.

And as we talk and share—and the list lengthens—you start to notice that the Spirit isn't confined to one place or one expression. There's no one image that sums it all up. In fact, you see how often the Spirit shows up in others: in community, in worship, in service, in prayer. And then you notice that the Spirit shows up in your life too in similar places: in the group of friends you know you can trust, in music that makes you cry, in times of service when you realize everyone has something to give—even the person you're serving, in wordy and wordless prayer that reminds you that *God hears you*.

And you notice too that the Spirit shows up outside of this building and outside of our ministries: *in noise on the streets, the greeting of a friend and chirping birds and the courage to do what's right*. And you start to wonder if, maybe, it was the Spirit speaking through your dream last night, through the impulse on your heart

to say yes when asked to help, through that tug inside that is nudging you to go back to school for another degree, through the casual decision to look in on a neighbor you haven't seen for awhile.

The Spirit seems, somehow everywhere at once. But at the same time, the Spirit seems impossible to see. *So where do we begin?*

A good place to start, is to think about the Spirit within the context of the Trinity. How does the Spirit take its place as part of the three-in-one? In the earliest centuries of the church—and indeed, even up to the 16th century Protestant Reformation—it was not uncommon for the church to raise a question about the origins of the Spirit. The question was often brought up as to whether the Spirit WAS God or was a creation of God the Father or of God in Christ. Church councils through the ages and the theologians of the reformation have continued to affirm that the Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, of one substance with God, working toward the same aim—yet distinct in its relationship with us, and with all of creation. Shirley Guthrie writes:

“(When we say), “I believe in God, the Father Almighty” (we) confess God *over us*. (When we say) ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord’ (we) confess God *with* and *for* us. When we say ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit’ (we) confess God *in* and *among* us.”¹

Although the Spirit is present in both the old and new testaments—even seen, in fact, in the opening verses of scripture, brooding over the waters of creation—throughout scripture the Spirit is the person of the Trinity who never speaks to humanity using words. The nature of the Spirit is to be immanent, present, indwelling. Perhaps that is why the best way to know the Spirit in and through our own lives.

Paul gives us the lens through which we can see the Spirit: look for the Spirit's fruits. In Galatians he writes that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. We read in Isaiah and Luke that the Spirit anoints us to bring God's kingdom justice, liberation from oppression, and wholeness for the broken. In every case, the Spirit points us toward Christ; orienting us toward God's redemptive love made visible in Jesus. *The fruits of the Spirit are a direct result of God's presence with us.*

This was true for the early church too. When the Spirit first showed up on Pentecost, the Spirit bore much fruit through Peter's speech to the people. God's story was told with clarity through Peter, and understood in every language. The church was born. 3,000 were baptized in one day. Lives were changed. And as

¹ Guthrie, Shirley C. Jr., *Christian Doctrine*. P 289.

the story continues, we see that the Spirit transformed lives of those who were a part of the early church—who shared all things in common, who studied scripture and worshipped and prayed together each day.

It is hard to see the Spirit acting upon us from the outside, because the Spirit doesn't stay at a safe distance. Instead, the Holy Spirit acts upon us from the inside out. The Spirit changes minds and hearts. The Spirit bestows gifts—not for one's own glorification, but gifts that are to be used to love God and love others in word and deed. And so we end up seeing the Spirit through repentance and forgiveness; through acceptance and hope; through hospitality and love.

If it is the Creator who makes us, and Jesus who redeems us, it is the Holy Spirit is who animates us—who wakes us up in the morning, who inspires us to service, who compels us to love. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in us, at work through us. It is what motivates us to follow God, allows us to hear God's word, equips us to love as God first loved us.

The Spirit always points us to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In our Epistle Lesson for today, Paul challenges the church in Corinth not to get caught up in the competing ideologies of the day, or to cling to philosophies masking as truth. Rather, Paul insists that true wisdom is found only through the power of the Spirit who reveals to God's people the wisdom of gospel of Christ, crucified and risen.

The same is true for us. We likewise live in an age of competing ideologies and relative truths. But the Spirit that dwells within us orients our hearts and minds and actions toward the life-giving truth of Christ, through whom we have been given new life. For some this awareness comes as loud and clear as clanging cymbals. For others, this direction comes through a still small voice speaking in the center of our heart. Through the Spirit, the breath of God, we can live in Christ, as did the first disciples on Pentecost: aware of God's claim on our lives, strengthened to proclaim the good news of Christ's redemptive love in word and deed, *living* out the gospel of Christ.

Barbara Brown Taylor puts it like this:

Disciples who had not believed themselves capable of tying their own sandals without Jesus discovered abilities within themselves they never knew they had. When they opened their mouths to speak, they sounded like Jesus. When they laid their hands upon the sick, it was as if Jesus himself had touched them. In short order, they were doing things they had never seen anyone but him do, and there was no explanation for it, except that they had dared to inhale on the day of Pentecost. They had sucked in God's own breath and they had been transformed by it. The Holy Spirit had entered into them the same way it had entered into Mary, the mother of Jesus, and for the same reason. It was time for God to be born again—not in one body this time but in a body of believers who would

receive the breath of life from their Lord and pass it on, using their own bodies to distribute the gift.²

It is an exciting vision, and a hope-filled promise: that the Holy Spirit equips God's people to do God's work in the world—as individuals, and as a community. But the presence of the Holy Spirit is not about the church receiving Christian super-powers for healing and teaching, and preaching and caring so that we might be heroic ourselves. Through the power of the Spirit, we bear Christ into the world for love's sake, and for the sake of the one true God who first loved us. And it is only because of God's grace poured out upon us that we become instruments of God's grace in a hurting and broken world.

When it's all said and done, the Holy Spirit is one more expression of God's great love for us. Not only did God create us in love and redeem us in love—but God sustains us in love, dwelling within us, empowering us for service, filling us with the wisdom and love of God, and interceding for us with sighs when words will fail. The Holy Spirit then calls us to love—to an ever deepening love of God; to an ever deepening love of others.

Guthrie says:

The gift of a new life of love, the gift of new truth, the gift of a new community different from other communities—these are inseparable gifts of the Holy Spirit and marks of true Christian spirituality. We cannot give them to ourselves. But if we earnestly desire them and do what we can to open ourselves to receive them, then we may pray an ancient prayer of the church, confident that it will be answered in surprising ways in our own lives, in the church, and in the world around us: “Come Holy Spirit.”³

So keep your eyes open and your ears clear. Keep your heart ready and your hands available and your mind poised for transformation. The Spirit is, continually, on the move—in us, through us, and all around.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

² Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Home Another Way*. “the Gospel of the Holy Spirit” p 145.

³ Guthrie, Shirley C. Jr., *Christian Doctrine*. P 312.